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MOBILE, ALA.,
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Business funds arts

By ANN REISFELD

Our Capital Bureau

WASHINGTON — In Moline, Ill., concert pianist Barbara Nissman gives a series of 30-minute performances in the cafeteria of John Deere & Co., a manufacturer of heavy farm and garden equipment. The noon concerts, paid for by the corporation, are free for the 300 lunching employees.

— In St. Louis, guards at the St. Louis Art Museum are taught to handle visitors with tact and friendliness. The cost of seven training sessions is underwritten by the Measuregraph Co., Measuregraph, which makes light industrial machinery, believes that a less forbidding atmosphere will draw bigger crowds to view the city's art treasures.

— In New Orleans, J. Aron & Co. Inc., a coffee importing firm, restores a 19th-century building and establishes a coffee museum inside.

In New York City, a spokesman for the Mobil Foundation says that Mobil Oil Corp. last year gave more than \$7 million to arts and cultural programs. Ten years ago, Mobil's corporate contribution to the arts was near zero.

Across the country, it is clear that business support of the arts is booming. The past decade has brought an 800 percent increase in corporate arts contributions — from \$27 million in 1967 to \$216 million in 1976.

A dozen corporations last year each donated more than \$1 million to the arts, and most American businesses supported at least one arts program. In 1976, the arts received almost 12 percent of the total corporate philanthropic dollar — up from less than 3 percent in 1965.

One force behind the tide is the little-known but prestigious Business Committee for the Arts. A private, tax-exempt, national organization, the committee was formed in 1967 to encourage businesses to support the arts and to promote the idea that it's a good investment.

President Goldwin A. McLellan said in an interview that the committee is largely responsible for the spurt in its donations.

McLellan and others agree, however, that a major share of the credit belongs to the National Endowment for the Arts, the federal government's arts funding arm. The endowment's annual budget also has

ding.

— Act as a clearinghouse for corporations and arts institutions.

It works to accomplish these aims by:

— Presenting conferences — approximately one a month from September through May — where from 100 to 200 top local businessmen are invited to hear speeches and seminar discussions on the advantages of cultural support. Next year, conferences are scheduled in Texas, Oregon, Arizona, Michigan, Florida, Georgia and Virginia.

— Drumming up corporate arts support through advertising campaigns in national magazines. The space is provided free as a tax-deductible public service.

— Giving annual awards, in co-sponsorship with Forbes magazine, to businesses that have made innovative arts contributions.

Conceived and operated by businessmen, BCA never fails in its persuasion techniques to emphasize that supporting the arts is good business. First, corporations can deduct from their taxes up to 5 percent of pre-tax income for cultural contributions. Second are the deductions allowed for business expenses. The latter, broader category enables corporations to deduct all or part of costs such as salaries of "arts" personnel and advertising and promotion of arts programs. For example, if a company funds a public television series like "Upstairs, Downstairs," money spent to support the program, as well as ads purchased to publicize it, are deductible as "normal expenses of doing business."

Then there is the positive public relations generated by supporting the arts. That plus has not been lost on the oil companies, which have been battling a poor image since gasoline prices began to soar. According to BCA figures, arts contributions by five major oil companies increased 540 percent (to \$12.5 million) in the four years since the energy shortage. Finally, there is the notion that arts-minded employees are more creative workers. "After all," says George S. Rosborough Jr., president of Measuregraph, "the arts foster imagination, and a business only grows by imagination."

BCA's low-key, businesslike approach seems to work well with corporate executives. "It's terrific," says Rosborough. "They can offer

greatest share of the corporate philanthropic dollar goes to museums, followed by public broadcasting and symphony orchestras. Grants to individual artists are at the bottom of the list.

McLellan concedes that "business tends to feel uncomfortable with the avant-garde, but it is less cautious today than 10 years ago.

"In the end it comes down to public acceptance. If a dance company is performing nude and nobody comes to see it, it won't get corporate support. But if people are breaking down the doors to get in, it will be funded."

Critics also warn that corporate support could lead to corporate control and that funds could be withdrawn if a corporation disapproves of a donee's output. As a related example, they cite the recent move by Dow Chemical Co. to cut off funds to a Midwestern university that sponsored a speech to the students by actress Jane Fonda.

Miss Fonda took the occasion to blast big business in general and Dow in particular.

McLellan asserts that potential control "is not a problem; businessmen are too busy running the company."

Carl Stover of the National Endowment for the Arts agrees. "The Jane Fonda incident is an isolated case," he says. "I know of no one in the corporate world with a personal inclination to dictate content."

It is perhaps ironic that as arts institutions gain larger audiences their need for outside support increases. "The more they grow the more they need," says McLellan. "There are no labor-saving devices available to the arts."

credit belongs to the National Endowment for the Arts, the federal government's arts funding arm. The endowment's annual budget also has had striking increases, from \$2.5 million in 1965, when it was established to more than \$114 million in 1976. Gains also have been made by state and local governments; arts councils, which numbered 125 10 years ago, now exist in more than 1,800 communities.

"Heightened interest in the arts is happening at every level and on all sides," says one arts administrator. "I don't think any one thing is totally responsible. But BCA (Business Committee for the Arts) has brought the arts to the attention of the corporate community."

BCA first was proposed by David Rockefeller in a 1966 speech to the National Industrial Conference Board. Drawing from a Rockefeller panel report, "The Performing Arts — Problems and Prospects," the former president of the Chase Manhattan Bank suggested creating an organization to match corporate philanthropic dollars and arts institutions' needs. The speech was so well received that plans for the committee were drawn up the following year.

The committee was funded its first three years by grants from the Rockefeller, Ford and Old Dominion Foundations. Since then it has been supported by annual dues of up to \$5,000 from its members.

Currently, BCA has 123 members, all initiated by invitation only. Most are chairmen or presidents of major corporations, such as Lee A. Iacocca, president of Ford Motor Co., Donald S. MacNaughton, chairman of Prudential Life Insurance Co. of America, and George S. Seybolt, chairman of the board of Wm. Underwood Co.

The committee deliberately keeps a low profile by limiting its membership and avoiding self-promotion. "We are only catalysts," explains McLellan, who spent 20 years with the Oiln Corp. before David Rockefeller convinced him to join BCA.

"We want the corporations and the arts organizations to get the recognition."

BCA's goals, as stated in its brochure, are to:

- Make statistical information about arts support available to the business community.
- Counsel firms that are interested in beginning or expanding programs supporting the arts.
- Advise arts organizations on five ways to seek corporate fun-

by designation.

BCA's low-key, businesslike approach seems to work well with corporate executives. "It's terrific," says Rooborough. "They can offer over 2,000 ideas that have already been implemented."

In fact, BCA regularly publishes a booklet containing examples of how companies support the arts. The most recent edition, released last May, lists 2,507 examples in 22 categories.

A perusal of the 35-page booklet reveals that more than 20 companies now promise to match, dollar for dollar or more, contributions by employees to their favorite arts institutions. Many of the nation's finest art collections are now owned by corporations. Some of the collections contain works by masters such as Alexander Calder and Henry Moore; others consist mainly of works by developing young artists.

"We encourage businessmen to decorate their offices with works by local artists," says Emil Hess, BC member and chairman of the board of Parisians, a Birmingham, Ala., department store. As a result, notes Hess, who is president of the Birmingham Symphony Association and chairman of the Alabama School of Fine Arts, "Birmingham has a large number of quality artists."

Time Inc., Ciba-Geigy Corp. and others sponsor free admission programs for employees to their city museums. J. Aron & Co. and the House Co. are among those that provide their workers with tickets to local ballet and symphony performances.

"We realize the importance of the arts not only in the community but also in the lives of our individual employees," explains David C. Farrell, chief executive of the May Co., which has headquarters in St. Louis. "So we try to sponsor the arts not just in community museums and orchestras, but also in our own employee community."

Still other companies bring entertainment to the factory premises. Atlantic Richfield sponsors a concert series in the roof garden of its parking facility; Security Pacific National Bank brings performing artists to its lobby.

Though corporate arts funding is generally applauded, it is not without critics. Some are quick to say that most of the funds go to well-established museums and orchestras rather than to experimental projects. In fact, BCA surveys show that the